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RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0333
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RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0243
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RUEHNJ/AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA 0532
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0517
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGUI 000237

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/C
USUN FOR DMUERS
PARIS FOR RKANEDA
LONDON FOR PLORD
NAIROBI FOR AKARAS
AFRICOM FOR JKUGEL
INR FOR CNEARY
DRL FOR SCRAMPTON

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [CT](#)
SUBJECT: GROWING CHINESE INFLUENCE IN THE CAR EVIDENT

REF: A. A- BANGUI 219 AND PREVIOUS
[1](#)B. REF: B - BANGUI 212 AND PREVIOUS

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[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A growing Sino-Central African (CAR) relationship is becoming increasingly evident in the CAR. President Bozize recently concluded his second state visit to China and sent another trade delegation back to Beijing shortly thereafter. Last week, the Chinese Ambassador laid the cornerstone for a new 100 bed hospital and announced earlier in the month a plan to ease the CAR's electrical crisis and begin oil exploration in the north of the country. This interest in oil may explain an unexpected and sudden decrease in tension in the CAR's troubled northeastern region of the Vakaga. Post suspects, from discussions with various reliable sources that the Chinese may have been the driving force, through Sudanese good offices, behind a local peace deal that is report to have significantly eased tensions which previously threatened to spill over into violence. While ethnic conflict in the Vakaga may still flair up, it is clear that China is making a strong economic and political play in the CAR. It seems equally clear that Bozize's government is welcoming this relationship as an alternative to more restrictive relations with the French and the West. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) During the Cold War, the CAR vacillated between recognizing China and Taiwan, depending on who was offering better terms, but since the early 1990's the Central Africans have recognized and increasingly favored the People's Republic. In addition to the new hospital and the administration's recent high-profile trips to China, some examples of this growing relationship are:

-- In 2007, a Chinese Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs visited the CAR to explore cooperation in the forestry and petroleum sectors.

-- In comparison to AmEmbassy Bangui, which is functioning with four resident American officers (all State), the Chinese embassy has approximately 40 employees and is ramping up its military cooperation, public diplomacy and development efforts.

-- Currently, the Chinese have subcontracted the building of a massive hotel previously begun by the Libyan government and have various health and agriculture programs underway.

-- Post also understands that a Chinese company has purchased a significant part of the French uranium company AREVA's interest in Central African mines. Similarly, there are repeated rumors of their interest in the iron discovery on the Canadian company AXMIN's concession north of Bambari. This might even include construction of a railroad.

-- Approximately 40 CAR military officers go to China for training each year; a number which dwarfs the two or three IMET students sent to the United States and the 10 to 15 sent to training by the French. And, perhaps more to the point, this training is unlikely to include an annoying (from the CARG point of view) human rights element.

-- Cooperation does not stop at infrastructure and military cooperation, a week of Chinese Culture was recently celebrated, and articles (placed and paid for by the Chinese Embassy) extolling the virtues of China are now mainstays in Bangui's leading newspapers. This public diplomacy campaign is new this year.

Details are difficult to come by as the Central Africans are very careful in discussing their dealing with the Chinese, but

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the infrastructure and cultural projects are evident and symbolic of a deepening relationship.

13. (SBU) While Bozize's trip to China was overtly political, Post has not previously seen what it suspects to be Chinese activity in the internal affairs of the CAR. During an October trip to the Vakaga with the P-5 ambassadors (Ref A), Poloff remarked that the Chinese Ambassador asked very direct, and surprisingly basic, questions about what was needed for a solution to the crisis. It was clear at the time that a political agreement between the local warring factions was still lacking and tensions remained high. At one point, Ambassador Shi Hu asked the particularly influential Sudanese consul if the Government of Sudan could broker a deal. (COMMENT: At the time, these seemed to be questions of a naive observer, new to the troubles in the Vakaga, but we now suspect that the Ambassador was perhaps attempting to assess how to pacify the area to make it safe for Chinese research teams. END COMMENT.).

14. (SBU) On November 2, the National Assembly Deputy from Birao, Vakaga, called on the DCM. Unexpectedly, the Deputy stated that the factions, thought to be on the brink of renewed conflict, have agreed to disarm. Pressed as to the reasons why this ease in tension came about so unexpectedly, the Deputy said a newly formed ``council of wise people'' had cleared up the differences between the ethnicities, and each group now hopes to join the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration process (Ref B).

15. (SBU) On November 3, Poloff met with a very well-informed western military observer who confirmed that he too had heard of the rapid decrease in tensions in the Vakaga, though he was notified by the rebels, not the CARG. He put forth the following hypotheses: Sudan - which, through its Consul in Birao and various economic interests, virtually controls the Vakaga - has brokered a deal between the warring factions. The contact speculated that this was done at the behest of China as he has concrete information that the oil fields that the Chinese ambassador mentioned are just northwest of Birao, and the

Chinese do not want instability jeopardizing the project (NOTE: The Chinese were dismayed by the killing of several of their oil exploration personnel in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia a few years ago and may be expected to be cautious in the CAR. END NOTE.) Furthermore, the contact confirmed that eight Chinese officials arrived at the Birao airport last week for unspecified reasons. This is a tremendous number in a region which has almost no contact with outsiders other than MINURCAT and a few NGOs.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: The Chinese have steadily increased their visibility and influence in the CAR, a country rich in untapped natural resources. During the Chinese national day reception on October 1, CARG officials and Ambassador Shi Hu lavished praise on one another and predicted an economic renaissance for the CAR, even as the electricity failed repeatedly. With French investments moribund and French influence in general decline, the Chinese are likely positioning themselves as the CAR's primary benefactor in exchange for access to the CAR's ample deposits of uranium, gold, iron, diamonds, and possibly oil. Although Chinese aid and investment is unlikely to come with troublesome caveats regarding democratic practices and economic transparency, they are apparently interested in promoting the pacification of troubled areas in northern CAR in order to protect their own interests and personnel. The full extent of Chinese involvement in the CAR is still subject to some conjecture, but it appears clear that:

-- The Chinese are actively seeking greatly expanded influence

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in the CAR, almost certainly to gain access to economic resources; and,

-- President Bozize may increasingly embrace the Chinese as an alternative to the French and other Western benefactors.

It is also clear that President Bozize has less and less reason to listen to the United States messages encouraging transparency in governance and respect for human rights. END COMMENT.
COOK